

Corellas

by Alex Hayman

Eva's parents went out and left pizza. She wandered into the sunroom that gave a view of the football oval. She liked it best in winter when the trees were bare. That was football season. She watched Danny; he always stayed late and made the field his. Watching him was her secret. Danny went to her school, but they never spoke. He lived on the other side of the field, beyond the eucalypts full of corellas.

Eva sat with a book, looking out at the end of chapters, watching the sky turn from orange to pink to purple. Danny was going through his usual routine. Ten deliberate steps in a straight line to the middle of the goals. His socks sagged and billowed at the ankles. She walked down to the back fence, carrying the pizza box. It seemed dark enough to peer over the fence without being seen.

A flock of corellas, like small cockatoos, rose from the eucalypts and circled the goals that Danny was aiming at. He kicked the ball and they swooped and ducked around it. Eva thought the dark was tricking her eyes when the ball took a forty-five degree turn and a white object dropped from the sky. The corellas fought for position above the goal posts while Danny walked slowly to the struck bird.

From where Eva was watching, Danny was the size of her thumbnail. He bent over the stunned corella and held his boot directly above it. He hesitated, stepped over it, and walked to where his ball lay under the trees.

Eva took a bite of her pizza. All she got was dough, barbeque sauce and some dried capsicum. Danny was gone. She took another bite and waited to see if he'd return. Putting the pizza box down, Eva unlatched the gate. She paced to the bird as the wind bit her face and legs. It got between her shirt buttons and into her bones. The corella lay on its back, its wings splayed and flapping with what little heart it had left. There was enough light to see that its face was wrong. Where there should have been a beak was a red and black hole. She

looked away, doubled over, and fought an impulse to be sick. She gathered the strength to examine it further, but the bird was on its feet now, scurrying in circles, chasing its tail and then stopping on one spot, swinging its head wildly.

‘Hey!’ Danny called as he jogged towards her.

‘Fuck!’ she blurted.

Danny slowed as he reached her and shook his head at the bird. He held a rock in the palm of his hand. It was the size of the bird’s head. Eva wanted to leave but her confused senses wouldn’t allow action, so she just turned away.

‘You’re a bloody idiot, you know that?’ Danny spoke to the bird. ‘I told you it’d happen to one of youse one day. Fuck’s sake, what a mess you got yerself into.’

He went quiet, then his breathing got loud. The wind smothered the full volume of the impact – the sound of a toy pistol being shot. Eva had been hugging herself against the cold. She unwrapped her arms and spun around. Danny had the bird in his hands.

‘Come with me, eh?’ He said as he strode toward the eucalypts. ‘We need to bury this sucker.’ She felt obliged – he’d ended her nightmare. He slowed so she could catch up.

‘Thing is, bloody bird’s got no sense of direction without its beak. The eyes use it as a guide, you know? Without it it’s like they can see everything at once. Drives ’em mad. But I never seen it before. Only heard.’

He flashed his eyes at her, ‘Crazy, huh?’

‘Horrible. Just, awful,’ she replied.

‘Yeah. That too.’

They neared the pack of corellas around the base of the goal posts. Danny threw the rock at them and they rose as one, circled the sky and settled in the trees. The screeching chorus grew louder as they closed on them. Eva realised that the wind had made them seem quiet from a distance.

Danny stopped in the shadow of the trees and looked up. ‘Pretty loud, eh?’

Eva replied but he didn’t respond. Maybe he hadn’t heard her.

They pushed through the wall of sound and into the playground behind the red-bricked blocks of flats.

‘You want to bury it here?’ Eva asked.

‘Yep. Wood chip. Much easier to dig.’

Danny scooped up chips and dirt with his hands, digging deeper than Eva expected. He placed the bird in the hole.

‘This bird died trying to stop me from kicking a goal. That’ll teach ’em.’

He covered the bird and said to her, ‘Thanks for that, bud. It’s my night to sort dinner though. Gotta run.’ As Danny left the playground he stopped and faced Eva, a smile reached his eyes and he winked. Then he ran off.

She walked back through the lane, down the road and under the trees. The birds were asleep or just quiet. She used the light from the flats to guide her steps.

When Eva opened her gate and crept into the yard, she stepped on something cushiony. The pizza. She sat down next to it and studied the house. Her parents weren’t back yet. A wind picked up and she noticed how cold it’d become, but she didn’t move. She sat there, reliving the past half hour. The bird falling from the sky, the rock in Danny’s hand, and the smile in his eyes when he said goodbye.